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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality

Statement submitted by Focus on the Family, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The foundation for equality between men and women, and the basis of our duty to respect and honor one another, is the reality that men and women are *equally created in God's image*. The Creator designed us differently, but so that our inherent differences would be *complementary*. The inescapable realities born out in the social research of the past four decades are that men need women and women need men; that marriage and family are irreplaceable institutions; and that men, women and children achieve the greatest happiness, health and well-being in stable, intact families.

Every week at Focus on the Family, 10,000 people call, write or e-mail us with personal issues related to marriage, family, children and adolescents, parenting, infidelity, divorce, pornography, domestic violence, child abuse, sexual abuse, identity and self-esteem, homosexuality, alcoholism and various addictions. During the past 27 years, we have found that when men respect women, husbands love their wives, wives respect their husbands, children honor their parents, and boys respect girls, most of these issues, including issues related to identity, gender and rights, can be resolved.

Men and Boys Should Respect the Inherent Equality of Women and Girls

Because women are created equally in God's image, men should always in all circumstances be respectful toward women, especially their own wives and daughters.

Likewise, boys and young men should always be respectful toward girls and young women. This includes matters of sexuality. One of the greatest ways a young man can demonstrate respect toward a young woman is to not ask or demand to have sexual relations with her, but to wait until they have publicly committed themselves to one another in a covenant of marriage.

Inherent Equality is Compatible with Diversity of Roles

While men and women are created equally in God's image, both nature and volumes of scientific and social research inform us that male and female are inherently different. For females, the connection between the right and left brain hemispheres is qualitatively different than the connection in male's brains. One result of this is the discrepant verbal abilities between males and females. Consequently, if a husband recognizes and respects the unique differences between him and his wife and daughters, and listens to and seeks to understand them, he will honor them, build their self-esteem and deepen their relational bonds.

Women complete men; men complete women. This completion and complementarity is rooted in their differences. Men cannot complete other men, nor do women complete other women.

Our experience has taught us that many of the social problems we deal with today are because of men who have failed to be loving, servant leaders to their wives and children; men who have abused, neglected or abandoned their wives or children; or confusion about our identities as male and female, and how we were designed to complement one another.

Stable Marriages Benefit Men and Women

Monogamous marriage is the great domestic and social equalizer. Historian Gail Collins explained in her book, *AMERICA'S WOMEN*, that one of the most important social roles women play in history is "getting men to behave" by channeling their passions and work behaviors in socially productive ways.[1]

Marriage has served the following purposes in all known human civilizations:

- Marriage regulates sexuality, keeping it confined to committed, loving relationships.
- Marriage domesticates men, channeling their sexual and masculine energy in building family and community.
- Marriage protects woman from exploitation by men.

Abundant published research on how family breakdown affects people is convincing many scholars that marriage has had a much greater and more positive impact on women and men than many had assumed. Sociologist Linda Waite and researcher Maggie Gallagher explain, "The evidence from four decades of research is surprisingly clear: a good marriage is both men's and women's best bet for living a long and healthy life."[2]

Men and women who are in their first marriages, on average, enjoy significantly higher levels of physical and mental health than their peers in any other relational category.

Dr. Robert Coombs of UCLA reviewed more than 130 empirical studies published in the 20th century on how marriage impacts well-being, finding "an intimate link between marital status and personal well-being."[3]

Published studies show that marriage usually provides rich benefits for husbands and wives:

- Increased levels of general happiness and contentedness
- Decreased depression
- Decreased alcoholism and other substance abuse[4]
- Increased lifespan[5]
- Increase in all measures of physical and mental health[6]

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[1] Gail Gollins, *America's Women: 400 Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates and Heroines*, (New York: William Morrow, 2003), pp 3-14; 316-324.

[2] Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially*, (New York Doubleday, 2000), p. 64.

[3] Robert Coombs, "Marital Status and Personal Well-Being: A Literature Review," *Family Relations* 40 (1991) 97-102.

[4] Coombs, 1991, p. 97.

[5] I.M. Joung, *et al.*, "Differences in Self-Reported Morbidity by Marital Status and by Living Arrangement," *International Journal of Epidemiology* 23 (1994): 91-97; Linda J. Waite, "Does Marriage Matter?" Presidential Address to the American Population Association of America, April 8, 1995; Linda Waite, "Does Marriage Matter?" *Demography* 32 (1995): 483-507.

[6] David Williams, *et al.*, "Marital Status and Psychiatric Disorders Among Blacks and Whites," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 33 (1992): 140-157.

- Decreased life stress

Additional research shows that marriage:

- Provides the highest levels of sexual pleasure and fulfillment for men and women[7]
- Protects against feelings of loneliness[8]
- Protects women from sexual, domestic and general violence[9]
- Enhances a parent's ability to parent[10]
- Helps create better, more reliable employees[11]
- Increases individual earnings and savings.[12]

Marriage is beneficial for men, women and children because it brings men and women together into a lifelong, committed, cooperative relationship.

Importance of the Intact Marriage and Family to Children & Child Development

Research over the last 100 years consistently shows us that marriage provides a treasure chest of good things for adults, children and society. That is why it serves as the foundation of family in all civilizations, and is the best way to ensure that children grow up with a mother and a father.

Published studies show that a stable marriage and family provide rich benefits for children:

- Increase in all levels of intellectual and educational development[13]
- Increased sympathy and consideration of others
- Decreased need to visit doctors for physical and emotional problems
- Decreased incidents of idleness (being out of school and not working)

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[7] Robert T. Michael, *et al.*, *Sex in America: A Definitive Survey*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1994), p. 124-129; Edward O. Laumann, *et al.*, *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 364, table 10.5; Andrew Greeley, *Faithful Attraction: Discovering Intimacy, Love and Fidelity in American Marriage*, (New York: Tom Doherty Association, 1991), see chapter 6.

[8] Randy Page and Galen Cole, "Demographic Predictors of Self-Reported Loneliness in Adults," *Psychological Reports* 68 (1991): 939-945.

[9] Jan Stets, "Cohabiting and Marital Aggression: The Role of Social Isolation," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53 (1991): 669-680; Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1992," U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, (March 1994), p. 31, NCJ-145125.

[10] Ronald Angel and Jacqueline Angel, *Painful Inheritance: Health and the New Generation of Fatherless Families* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), pp. 139, 148.

[11] Janet Wilmoth and Gregor Koso, "Does Marital History Matter? Marital Status and Wealth Outcomes Among Pre-retirement Adults," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64 (2002): 743-754.

[12] Waite, 1995, p. 483-507. Waite & Gallagher, 2000, see ch. 8; Wilmoth & Koso, 2002, p. 743-754.

[13] Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 19; Deborah Dawson, "Family Structure and Children's Health and Well-Being: Data from the 1988 National Health Interview Survey on Child Health," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53 (1991): 573-584.

- Decrease in violence, and being in trouble at school or with the law[14]
- Decreased participation in drugs[15]
- Decreased likelihood of premarital sexual activity and child-bearing[16]
- Decreased danger of physical and sexual abuse[17]
- Decreased likelihood of living in poverty[18]

All things being equal, children with married parents consistently do better in every measure of well-being than their peers in any other type of family arrangement. And being a member of an intact nuclear family is a stronger indicator of well-being than the race, economic or educational status of parents or the neighborhood in which these children grow up.

Importance of Father Love and Mother Love to Boys and Girls

An analysis of more than 100 studies on parent-child relationships found that having a loving and nurturing father was *as important* for a child's happiness, well-being, and social and academic success *as having a loving and nurturing mother*.[19]

Children need mothers and fathers because:

- Mothers and fathers parent differently
- Mothers and fathers play differently
- Fathers push limits; mothers stress safety
- Mothers and fathers communicate differently
- Mothers and fathers discipline differently
- Mothers and fathers help children prepare for life and the world differently
- Mothers and fathers provide a look at the world of women and men
- Fathers teach respect for women
- Fathers stimulate development of *large* motor skill
- Mothers stimulate development of *fine* motor skills.

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[14] Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi, *A General Theory of Crime* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 103; Elaine Kamarck and William Galston, "Putting Children First: A Progressive Family Policy for the 1990s," whitepaper from the Progressive Policy Institute (September 27, 1990), pp. 14-15.

[15] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *The Relationship Between Family Structure and Adolescent Substance Use*, Rockville, MD: National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, 1996.

[16] Dawn Upchurch, et al., "Neighborhood and Family Contexts of Adolescent Sexual Activity," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 61 (1999): 920-930.

[17] Michael Stiffman, *et al.*, "Household Composition and Risk of Fatal Child Maltreatment," *Pediatrics*, 109 (2002), 615-621; Michael Gordon, "The Family Environment of Sexual Abuse: A Comparison of Natal and Stepfather Abuse," *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 13 (1985): 121-130.

[18] David Ellwood, *Poor Support: Poverty in the American Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p. 46.

[19] Ronald P. Rohner and Robert A. Veneziano, "The Importance of Father Love: History and Contemporary Evidence," *Review of General Psychology* 5.4 (2001): 382-405.

Unique Contributions of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Boys and Girls

In 1999, the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* published a report summarizing the previous 20 years of research on how fathers contribute to child development. The authors discovered that 82 percent of the studies found "significant associations between positive father involvement and offspring well-being."[20] Here is what a caring, involved father can do for his boys and girls:

- Build security, confidence, attachment and problem-solving skills[21]
- Increase school readiness, self-control and understanding of appropriate behavior[22]
- Help develop stronger cognitive, motor and verbal skills[23]
- Help make wise life choices[24]
- Help curb violence in boys by teaching them appropriate social behavior and curbing anti-social aggression[25]
- Help develop empathy and compassion.[26]

Leading child psychologist Michael E. Lamb reminds us that fathers have become the "forgotten contributors to child development."[27]

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[20] Paul R. Amato and Fernando Rivera, "Paternal Involvement and Children's Behavior Problems," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 61 (1999): 375-384.

[21] Kyle D. Pruett, *Fatherneed: Why Father Care is as Essential as Mother Care for Your Child*, (New York: The Free Press, 2000), pp. 41-42.

[22] Henry B. Biller, *Father and Families: Paternal Factors in Child Development* (Westport, CT: Auburn House, 1993); Paul R. Amato, *Children in Australian Families: The Growth of Competence*, (New York: Prentice Hall, 1987); Pruett, 2000, p. 52.

[23] Ellen Bing, "The Effect of Child-Rearing Practices on the Development of Differential Cognitive Abilities," *Child Development* 34 (1963): 631-648; Norma Radin, "Father-Child Interaction and the Intellectual Functioning of Four-Year-Old Boys," *Developmental Psychology* 6 (1972): 353-361; Ross Parke, *Fatherhood*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Henry B. Biller, "The Father and Personality Development: Paternal Deprivation and Sex-Role Development," in Michael E. Lamb, *ed.*, *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1981), p. 104.

[24] Frank Furstenberg and Kathleen Harris, "When and Why Fathers Matter: Impacts of Father Involvement on Children of Adolescent Mothers," in *Young Unwed Fathers: Changing Roles and Emerging Policies*, R. Lerman and T. Ooms, eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

[25] Forensic Psychologist Shawn Johnston, quoted in *The Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, March 29, 1998, from Wade and Sylvester, 2002, p. 106; Anne Hill and June O'Neil, *Underclass Behaviors in the United States: Measures and Analysis of Determinants*, (New York: City University of New York, 1993).

[26] Robert R. Sears, *et al.*, *Patterns of Childrearing* (Evanston, IL: Row Peterson, 1957); Pruett, 2000, p. 48; Richard Koestner, et al., "The Family Origins of Empathic Concern: A Twenty-Six Year Longitudinal Study," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58 (1990): 709-717.

[27] Ronald P. Rohner and Robert A. Veneziano, "The Importance of Father Love: History and Contemporary Evidence," *Review of General Psychology* 5.4 (2001): 382-405.

Conclusion

The best way men can contribute to the well-being of women and girls is to love, respect, be faithful to, build the self-esteem of, and be involved in the lives of their wives and daughters, and to teach their sons and others to do the same.